



Making a Difference . . .

The Impact of Early Abuse on Male Sexual and Reproductive Health

ISSUE IN BRIEF

Exposure to physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse as a child generally affects future behavior. To date, research has focused primarily on the impact of abuse on girls; there is very little information that documents the impact of abuse on boys. However, data we do have indicate that males who have experienced child sexual abuse, physical abuse, and/or witnessed family violence, are more likely to act out sexually, have sexual identity confusion and sexually transmitted infections (STI) (Loeb, 2002). Adult males who have experienced such abusive behavior are also more likely to report low self-esteem, depression, problems with anger, interpersonal relationships, male gender identity, sexual orientation, and sexual offending behavior (Linder, 2005).

Putting Healthy Teen Network's Advocacy Resource Guides to Work

You can use Healthy Teen Network's Advocacy Resource Guides to:

1. Urge local and state policymakers to address issues that are important to the health and success of today's youth.
2. Educate school administrators or health care officials about unique issues facing adolescents.
3. Engage with the media (e.g., in a letter to the editor or an interview) using effective language to frame an issue facing youth.
4. Present to funders on why they should invest in your work with or on behalf of youth.
5. Connect to more information on youth issues and other organizations advocating for youth.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Concern

The relationship between experiencing child sexual abuse, child physical or emotional abuse, and/or witnessing family violence, and engaging in risky sexual behavior has been well established (Zierler et al, 1991; Nagy et al, 1994; Raj et al, 2000; and Tilley & Brackley, 2005). However, while most of the literature has focused on the impact of such abuse on females, very little has focused on the impact on males. In fact, research, resources and support services tend to be geared toward females, with very little recognition that males are victims too and need those same resources and support services. Educators, service providers, and parents often do not identify that males can be victims of abuse and that abuse greatly impacts their behavior through adolescence and adulthood. Without recognition that males are victims of such abuse, boys and men stay silent about it, and never receive the help they need. In addition, because others are not aware abuse is occurring, the abuse continues unabated, further harming the victims and survivors.

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A societal paradigm shift is needed that de-emphasizes ruling gender stereotypes about males and abuse, particularly sexual and physical abuse, and that focuses on primary prevention of child sexual and physical abuse and interpersonal violence. Abused males often continue the cycle of abuse, either abusing their families or other children. One third of juvenile delinquents, 40 percent of sex offenders, and 76 percent of serial rapists reported experiencing child sexual abuse (CSA) (Holmes, W. & Slap, G., 1998). While not all victims/survivors of CSA end up as juvenile delinquents, sex offenders or alcoholics, it is clear that experiencing child sexual,

physical and emotional abuse, and/or witnessing family violence negatively impacts the males who have experienced such abuse, and puts their health, and those with whom they are physically intimate in danger.

While the abuse in and of itself is the problem, the lack of research, resources and support services for male victims and survivors exacerbates the problem for males, and does nothing to curb the resulting future behavior of these males. Society needs to recognize that interventions with survivors of child abuse, if accurately identified and treated, may curb risky sexual behavior as adolescents/adults.

Prevalence

It is difficult to determine the number of victims of child sexual, physical and emotional abuse, as so few victims report the abuse or even identify the actions perpetrated on them as abuse. However, estimates suggest that one in six males are victims of child sexual abuse (Finkelhor, 1990) and even more have witnessed and/or experienced family violence and child physical/emotional abuse (Jaffe, Hurley & Wolfe, 1990).

Although little is known about the prevalence of abuse on males, several studies have stated that women are at least two times as likely to experience physical and sexual abuse compared to men, the lower rates for males are thought to be a consequence of decreased disclosure (Raj et al, 2000; MA KIDS COUNT Report 2001; Adams, 2003). A literature synthesis on the relationship between a history of CSA and becoming a perpetrator of such abuse among men stated that men in American society are even less likely than women to report a history of CSA for reasons such as shame and sexual identity confusion (Adams, 2003).

It is evident that males' needs are not being met in terms of recognition, treatment and support, and consequently it is impacting their behavior and health as adolescents and adults.

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Impact on Behavior

The research that has been done regarding the effect of such abuse on males finds that male victims and survivors are more likely to engage in risky behaviors, sexual and otherwise. Studies indicate that there is a positive association between the history of child abuse and the practice of negative sexual behaviors and risk of increased involvement in interpersonal violence (Parrot & Zeichner, 2003). A history of child abuse is associated with substance abuse and practicing negative sexual behaviors in adolescent and adult males, such as early sexual activity, having multiple sex partners, engaging in sex resulting in pregnancy and condom non-use (Zierler et al, 1991; Nagy et al, 1994; Raj et al, 2000; Tilley & Brackley, 2005).

According to one longitudinal study that examined the relationship between history of sexual abuse and subsequent heterosexual transmission of HIV infection in adulthood, both male and female survivors of CSA were four times more likely than those without a history of CSA to report having worked as a prostitute, and eight times more likely to have a history of prostitution (Zierler et al, 1991). The study also found the men, in particular, that reported CSA had a two-fold increase in prevalence of HIV.

Other studies have found relationships between childhood victimization and alcohol and drug problems as adolescents and adults (Hernandez, 1992; Burnam et al, 1988). In addition, males who experience physical abuse as children and never receive treatment often exhibit antisocial and aggressive behavior later in life (Moe, King & Bailly, 2004). These negative psychological and behavior developments can impact their intimate relationships, particularly in the form of domestic violence (Parrot & Zeichner, 2003).

ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

HTN proposes the following action recommendations in order to increase awareness, education, support systems, behaviors and funding with the goal of promoting positive programs and policies for all men, particularly abused young men.

Awareness

- ✓ HTN recommends widespread efforts to:
 - increase awareness about the prevalence of physical, emotional, sexual and intimate partner abuse experienced by young boys and men and
 - work toward a society where males can recognize abuse, speak safely about their experiences, and receive adequate support and treatment to prevent unhealthy sequelae.

Education

- ✓ HTN recommends training and educational activities for all educators, service providers, parents, teachers, and children to better identify male victims/survivors of sexual, physical and/or interpersonal violence.

Support Systems

- ✓ HTN recommends creating services and support systems for males and their families, specifically to:
 - increase primary prevention resources to curb initial abuse;
 - improve identification strategies of males who experience abuse;
 - create better treatment/therapy options for victims/survivors of abuse; and
 - implement treatment therapies as soon as abuse is discovered and provide support to continue treatment from childhood through at least early adulthood.

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- ✓ HTN recommends that support systems for adolescents who have experienced sexual, physical and/or interpersonal violence build on and reinforce their strengths and resilience with strategies focused on acknowledging and recovering from trauma and victimization.
- ✓ HTN recommends increased interventions for male youth who have experienced sexual, physical, and/or interpersonal violence, such as mental health services, physical health care, clinics and other resources that cater to adolescent males.

Behaviors

- ✓ HTN recommends all adolescents be taught lessons about healthy relationships, open communication, positive sexuality and safe sexual behaviors.
- ✓ HTN recommends increasing the number of parenting classes and resources for fathers, including how to be an involved father and how to be in healthy, violence-free relationships, both with their child(ren) and the co-parent(s) of their child(ren).

Funding

- ✓ HTN recommends increasing funding streams to:
 - conduct research on the impact of abuse on the sexual and reproductive behavior of adolescent males;
 - improve treatment services, resources and interventions for abused males;
 - provide safe alternative living environments for males if their current residence is not an option; and advocate on behalf of male victims and survivors.

DEFINITIONS

Sexual abuse/violence: Sexual violence is a sex act completed or attempted against a victim's will or when a victim is unable to consent due to age, illness, disability, or the influence of alcohol or other drugs. It may involve actual or threatened physical force, use of guns or other weapons, coercion, intimidation or pressure (The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2002).

Physical abuse/violence: The intentional use of physical force with the potential for causing death, disability, injury, or harm (The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2004).

Emotional abuse: Acts or omissions by a person that have caused, or could cause, serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional, or mental disorders (The National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect).

Child sexual abuse: There is no universal definition of child sexual abuse. However, a central characteristic of any abuse is the dominant position of an adult that allows him or her to force or coerce a child into sexual activity. Child sexual abuse is not solely restricted to physical contact; such abuse could include non-contact abuse, including exposure, voyeurism, and child pornography. Abuse by peers also occurs (American Psychological Association, 2001).

RESOURCES

Child Trends

<http://www.childtrends.org>

Family Violence Prevention Fund

<http://endabuse.org/>

National Sexual Violence Resource Center

<http://www.nsvrc.org/saam/index.html>

National Organization on Male Sexual Victimization

[\(http://www.nomsv.org/\)](http://www.nomsv.org/)

ABOUT HEALTHY TEEN NETWORK

Healthy Teen Network (HTN) is a national membership organization that provides resources and services to professionals working in the field of adolescent reproductive health – specifically teen pregnancy prevention, teen pregnancy, and teen parenting.

Healthy Teen Network believes youth can make responsible decisions about sexuality, pregnancy and parenting when they have complete and accurate information, resources, and support that are culturally relevant and appropriate to their age, gender, and developmental stage.

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